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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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SUBJECT: BOUCHER'S CONVERSATION WITH KEY DONORS ON WHAT'S
NEEDED IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: STATE

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) In a working lunch in Kabul on November 8, the Ambassador, British Ambassador Evans, Japanese Ambassador Kosuge, and Deputy EU Representative Michael Semple told Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher the UN-led Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board Process set up by the London Compact is working -- but would benefit from more donor support. Special Representative of the Secretary General (and UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan head) Tom Koenigs explained that regular informal meetings of donor Ambassadors provided agreement on strategies for using the Coordination and Monitoring Board to motivate the ministries on London Compact benchmarks. There is no formal assignment mechanism for donors' tasks or financial responsibilities, but the process does identify targets for assistance and investment. All agreed the process is producing results. Boucher conveyed that, in capitals, there is sense that more coordination is needed. The Ambassadors agreed that coordination is best done in Kabul. Koenigs said he supported the idea of a Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board Political Directors meeting in Berlin. Koenigs underlined the need to balance aid in provinces in crisis with support for relatively stable regions. Evans said he wanted to flag UK concerns about a change of strategy on counternarcotics, and Koenigs stressed the importance of encouraging Pakistani-Afghan dialogue. Semple and Evans acknowledged concern with the Musa Qala Agreement, but argued it established peace and some sort of governance where none had existed. End Summary

Using the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board

¶2. (SBU) In a lunch in Kabul on November 8, with Assistant Secretary Boucher, Special Representative of the Secretary

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General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Tom Koenigs joined the British and Japanese Ambassadors, Deputy EU Representative, and the Ambassador in explaining how major donors work together in Afghanistan. They said the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board set up under the London Compact in December 2005 was proving to be an effective body for getting the ministries to become responsible for achieving Compact benchmarks. Koenigs convenes the key donor Ambassadors (in informal "tea club" meetings) to agree on strategies for engaging the ministries.

While there continues to be a good deal of hand-holding, Koenigs said the ministries have taken ownership of the working groups, where actions are taken to move initiatives along. Koenigs pointed out that a progress report, flagging need for greater effort, would be approved at the Board meeting on November 11. The UN Security Council would be attending the opening session. While tough, the report was evidence that Compact benchmarks were being taken seriously. Boucher was provided a copy of the draft report.

Donor Coordination: How Much and How?

13. (SBU) Answering Boucher's question, Deputy EU Representative Michael Semple said that the Board was not meant as a mechanism to coordinate donor activities, but that, by providing an agreed agenda, does identify targets for investment. While the report does not identify underfunded initiatives, it does flag areas where there is a need for "more effort." When Boucher asked if the process results in greater converging of donors' efforts, Koenigs' response was that there is at least less divergence among the

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donors than in the past -- especially in Kabul. Tea Club discussions regularly focus on the funding gaps. The Ambassador described the process as one of harmonizing the agendas rather than formal coordination. British Ambassador Evans agreed, saying that the process allows for slight differences in philosophy and approach, while encouraging complementarity. He noted, as illustrative, that Britain favors putting money into the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, while the U.S. is doing more direct assistance. Koenigs noted that some countries have chosen to specialize, while other have taken a broad-based approach. He cited Japan's sponsorship of the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program and Britain's focus on Helmand, contrasting these efforts to the broader focus of U.S. efforts. Each is invaluable as it is.

14. (SBU) Boucher said there is a sense in capitals that there is no effective donor coordination on Afghanistan. Koenigs acknowledged at this perception exists, but said, in his view, it reflected in part military impatience with the pace of redevelopment. There is too little appreciation that institution building is inherently slow, and that recovery and development will take time. The Ambassadors agreed. Boucher invited comments on the idea of donor countries "adopting a province." Ambassador Evans said he thought such an approach would inevitably undermine the central government, which would contradict a central premise of the London Compact.

15. (SBU) Koenigs said he liked the idea of a Joint Monitoring and Coordination Board Political Directors meeting in Berlin, as proposed by the Germans, in order to increase attention on Afghanistan. This might lead to a more solid long-term commitment in capitals. Koenigs was clear that more commitment to long-term support is essential, but also underlined the conference should not attempt to redo the work of the London Conference or attempt to coordinate in capitals at a level of detail that can only be done in Kabul. Ambassador Neumann reiterated the value of coordination on

the ground and asked what the goal of the meeting would be. Boucher explained that it could be used to encourage donors to work off a list of unfunded priorities to direct pledged monies that had not already been allocated to specific sectors or projects. Ambassador Evans offered that the NATO Riga Summit could "set the mood music" for such a meeting, complementing the Berlin meeting, which would identify potential targets.

Role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams and UN

¶16. (SBU) In response to Boucher's question about the link between the provinces and the central government, Semple noted that the responsibility formally lies with the Ministry of Interior, which he described as the "weakest of the lot." He acknowledged the role Provincial Reconstruction Teams play in building a partnership between the provincial and central governments, and also gave credit to long-established Non-Governmental Organizations. Semple observed that even President Karzai talks about the role that these organizations have played in building support for the state. Asked by Boucher about UN Mission's reach into the provinces, Koenigs said that there are currently ten provincial offices, with four more soon to be opened. In response to the Ambassador's query about UN priorities for the future, Koenigs listed the Joint Coordination and Monitoring process, robust police vetting, increased human rights monitoring, action against corruption, and encouraging a balanced approach to assistance. This last concern was to prevent concern with the "provinces in crisis" in the South leading to a failure to invest enough in maintaining the stability of the northern provinces.

Musa Qala Agreement: What Does it Mean?

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¶17. (SBU) In a pre-lunch conversation, there was an exchange of views on the Musa Qala Agreement. Semple argued that it was important to start with what governance had existed before the agreement -- which was "nothing." He went on to observe there has been much rumor mongering and defended the action of the elders, whom he characterized as not being part of the Taliban. His information indicates that the agreement represented a real social compact, but he agreed that the test would be whether the government would be allowed to play a role. If not, there is no Afghan Government authority even if its flag flies. Evans agreed with Semple's analysis, adding that the Deputy British Commander has reported that genuine elders (rather than the Taliban) seem to be in control. He acknowledge reports that one mullah was reportedly beaten and another person had reportedly disappeared, but said it was not clear the Taliban were responsible. Evans noted the agreement does provide for access to the district and reported the Provincial Police Chief intends to travel to Musa Qala -- but will avoid confrontation. Boucher and the Ambassador emphasized the outcome of the agreement must meet two tests. The Taliban can have no authority, and the current arrangement must evolve into a situation where there is real Government of Afghanistan authority. It would not be acceptable for the result to be a fragmented, disconnected local governance structure outside the authority of Kabul. Asked if the UN has a presence in Helmand, Koenigs said no.

Security and Development Projects in Other Provinces

¶18. (SBU) Semple compared the situation in Musa Qala after the agreement with that in Kunar, where he said much of province is essentially governed by tribal elders who have a

"healthy" relationship with provincial officials who are able to exercise a measure of authority. Boucher asked if the Taliban is working to control governance in the provinces. Semple responded that it is more a matter of the Taliban designating a de facto monitor to districts. This is the case in Uruzgan Province, except in Gizab District, where there is a governance vacuum and the Taliban have moved in to take effective control. Boucher asked how much actual (versus planned) development activity is taking place in the southern provinces. Koenigs reported that even under current security conditions, there are several hundred small projects, through UN organizations and using local implementing partners under the National Solidarity Program. Security is not such a problem on these small projects, as adjustments can be made on a day to day basis. On large projects, shutdowns due to security are more costly. Semple agreed, adding that, using local contractors increases local buy-in to the project. When locals are prepared to defend the projects to protect their jobs, this provides the best security.

Two Final Issues: Drugs and Pakistan

¶9. (C) Ambassador Evans asked for a moment to speak on counternarcotics issues, saying he wanted to flag for A/S Boucher the UK position that priority should be given to fully implementing Afghanistan's National Counternarcotics Strategy rather than introducing a new policy (eradication). Evans said that progress on implementing the strategy is inhibited by security problems, but it should not be abandoned. A/S Boucher responded that efforts to reward reduction in cultivation are strengthened when backed by increased eradication -- including spraying. He noted that poppy production is highest in some of the regions where there are the highest expenditure on alternative livelihood programs. (Note: A BBC article had appeared the day before the meeting, citing an Anti-Narcotics Ministry spokesman as

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saying the Afghan government was considering aerial spraying as a last resort. End note)

¶10. (SBU) Koenigs closed the meeting with the observation that efforts be increased to encourage Afghan-Pakistani dialogue and cooperation on as many levels and in as many sectors as possible. The UN is pushing for the joint economic commission to be reinstated and for the national security advisors to meet more regularly.

¶11. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher cleared this cable.
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